A REVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE ENGLISH NATION

Saturday, August 10. 1706.

I Cannot quit the Discourse of Plays without a Word about sober Plays, a thing now mightily talk'd of; I know no Argument remains, but that by which any Pretence to defend the Stage can be rais'd.

Now, if I would allow such a thing, *which really I cannot*, it comes before me to examine, when was such a Play acted, and what Reception did it meet with——— Let such Gentlemen ask Mr. *Dennis*, if his *Liberty asserted*, did not want the fashionable Gust to please the Palate of the Town; and all its Regularity of Parts, all its real Beauties of Performance could not supply the Defect.

'Tis true, Men of Vertue sometimes go to Plays———But I would ask, do they go to gratifie that Vertue; or to please a meaner Part of their Inclination, and which do they find most forward to prompt their Attendance!

I shall not trace our Plays here to expose the Indecencies of them, 'tis done to my Hand; Mr. *Collier* has pursued them thro' all their dark Ways, and detected them of all that's wicked and prophane.

But after all those powerful Reasons against them, what shall we say to the Gentlemen at *Oxford*, who entertain and encourage among them those Exciters of Crime to carry on the scandalous Trade among the Students, and crowd the young Ears of those, who are sent there to be initiated into a Love of Learning and Vertue, with the loose and lewd Excursions of our Mob Wit, and common Street Eloquence.

What

What can be ſaid to expreſs ſo notorious a Breach of Truſt, both upon the honeſt Founders of our Colleges for the Induction of Youth, and the honeſt Families of *Engliſh* Gentry, who ſend their Children to the Univerſities to be fitted and form'd for the Service of God and their Country?

But ſober Plays! ſober Plays may be acted, *ſay theſe People*: Well, Gentlemen of *Oxford*, which are they? Was Sir *John Falſtaff* a ſober Play, which you went *in form* to encourage, and which you had acted for the Repair of a *Church*, by which you ſet that fatal Example, which the Reverend Dr. *L*——*r* pleaded in Defence of the *ſecond Edition* of a Licenſe to the Stage here in *London*? Is not that Play as full of prophane, immoral, and ſome blaſphemous Parts, as moſt now extant? Is not Religion banter'd in it, the *Church* ridicul'd, and your Maker diſhonour'd?

Pray, Gentlemen, let ſome of your learned Society defend that Play; and tell us, how the chaſt Ears of a Proteſtant Divine could bear to hear the Affronts to his Dignity and Profeſſion, as acted upon your own Stage! Let them defend, if they can, your carrying the Students of the Univerſity to a Play, where they ſhould ſee the ſacred Office, *which they were then qualifying themſelves to undertake*, bantred by Scoundrels, made the Sport of the Stage, and the Actors clapt and huzza'd by the Profeſſors of it ——Is this the Encouragement to Youth to enter into the ſacred Employment, which they ſee ſhall always be the Jeſt and Ridicule of the World; and that they are to expect the Scoffs of the Stage, and the Contempt even of their Teachers?

Well, Gentlemen, the Players are gone down to *Oxford*——Having entred into the Service of the Sacred here, and having rais'd a Fund of 50*l.* for repairing a Chapel, what will the World ſay, but that now they are entirely lifted in the Roll, and engag'd in *Church* Work for good and all?

But take this Caution with you, Gentlemen, to regulate your ſelves by; that every Play they act before you, ſhall be ſhown to the World, the Spirit of the Review ſhall be with you, and there ſhall not be a bawdy Jeſt ſpoken, nor a prophane Sentence repeated, but he will tell the World, who laught and who did not; Not a Doctor, not a Head of a Houſe, not a Fellow of a College ſhall go to them, but they ſhall hear of it; and if you will be made publick, Gentlemen, and particular for ſcandalizing your Profeſſion, and reproaching the Age, take it for your Pains——This Paper declares againſt your Practice, not your Perſons; againſt the Crime, not the Colleges; is an Enemy to your Vice, not your Univerſity; and if you will ſin in publick, you muſt be content to hear of it in publick.

Give me no occaſion, Gentlemen, I ſhall be as proud of doing Juſtice to your Vertue, as in expoſing your Folly; I ſhall be as forward in acknowledging your ſtrict Government and regular Suppreſſion of the Vices and Follies of the Youth under your Care, as in detecting the Omiſſions of Duty. I have never attempted to expoſe the perſonal Vices and notorious Crimes, committed in our Univerſities; I know, where a Multitude of Youth are plac'd, there will be Follies, and will be Rakes, and none of the Immoralities of your Pupils reflect upon the Univerſities themſelves as ſuch; but thoſe which are wink't at, conniv'd or encourag'd by the Government of the Univerſity; if your Vice-Chancellors, Heads of Houſes, *&c.* correct the Crimes they meet with, they keep up the Reputation of Diſcipline——But if theſe commit the Crimes they ought to puniſh, that is the Act of the whole, and their Faults reflect upon the general Character.

I was always of Opinion, that our Reformation of Manners muſt begin among our Maſters, or it will never be finiſh'd among our Mob; the Examples of Magiſtrates and Rulers are the Pole-Stars of the People; if my own Watch goes wrong, it deceives no body but my ſelf; but if the Town Clock ſtrikes falſe, it impoſes upon the whole Pariſh——You, Gentlemen, therefore to whoſe Charge the Hopes of the Nation are committed, in the Flower of our Families, and the growing Supporters of Learning; if you miſ-guide, if you lead to Vice, Immorality and Prophaneneſs; if you teach our young Clergy to frequent Plays,

Inter-

Interludes and Theatrical Entertainments, not to God only, but to Men, you will be call'd to anſwer for the Breach of Truſt— You betray the Honour of your Profeſſion, and the good Name of the Univerſity.

And that I may remind you of this, and at the ſame time do Juſtice to your Brethren, who have more faithfully executed the Duty of their Places in a Truſt of the ſame Kind; I humbly recommend to you the Example of your Siſter *Cambridge*——

How have the Players been receiv'd there, and how their Encroachments reſented———The Devil has been always forward to creep into the Habitations of the faithful, and to make good a certain Verſe I preſume you have heard of; That

Where ever God erects a Houſe of Prayer,
The Devil always builds a Chapel there.

The Players, *not at all improperly call'd the Devil's Brokers*, have made ſundry Attempts to introduce themſelves at *Cambridge*; nor are they without a much better Pretence for it, than at *Oxford*; which Pretence would form ſuch an Excuſe for the *Cantabrigians*, as could not well be objected againſt, till other places ſuppreſt them alſo; I mean the vaſt Concourſe of People to *Stourbridge* Fair.

Here the Players have ſeveral Times attempted to erect the Devil's Chapel, and ſet up under Pretence of ſuperiour Licenſes; which Inſolence the late Reverend Vice-Chancellor rewarded by committing *Dogget* the Player to Jail as he deſerv'd, and ordering the Booth built for their Theatre to be demoliſh'd, effectually rooting up the Plantation of Vice they had erected, and baniſhing them from the Place.

How much more to the Honour of that Univerſity was this, than to ſee the Vice-Chancellor of the Univerſity of *Oxford*, with the Heads of Houſes in their Formalities, go in Proceſſion, follow'd by the Students, Inhabitants, and Ladies to the *Play-houſe*? which to me ſeems like a Picture I once ſaw abroad of King *Solomon*, with all his Court and a Train of Foreign Wives, *Anglicè*, *Whores*; having turn'd his Back upon the Temple, *the Houſe of God of his own Building*, and going in Proceſſion to offer Sacrifice to the Devil.

I forbear to turn the Improvement of this into Satyr, as it really deſerves; becauſe I take it to be a ſerious thing, and for a Lamentation to *England*. I know, 'tis a Grief to many worthy good Men, as well among the Clergy, as the other Members of the *Church* of *England*; who daily pray and wiſh to ſee it reform'd. I beſeech God to open the Eyes of the Perſons concern'd, to ſee how theſe Practices lay the Ax to the Root of the *Church*; how Vice in Authority, Vice in the Bowels of the *Church*, is a Sword at the Heart, a Mine under the Foundation, a Traytor in the Boſom, and the End will infallibly be either the Subverſion of true Religion, or in the Shame and Puniſhment of the Guilty.

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And whereas ſeveral Gentlemen have been at the Printer's of this Paper to deſire, that their ſeveral Greivances and Oppreſſions may be inſerted in the ſaid Account, which Mr. *Matthews* not being concern'd in the ſaid Book, could give no direct Anſwer to.

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